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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000327

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [UP](#) [AZ](#) [MD](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: KARASIN ON GEORGIA, NAGORNO-KARABAKH,  
TRANSNISTRIA, UKRAINE

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. DFM Karasin, in a meeting with the Ambassador February 9, praised the Geneva Talks for contributing to the relative calm in Georgia, while criticizing the Georgians for seeking scandal, the South Ossetians for boycotting the Incident Response Mechanism, and the co-chairs for hindering small-scale progress by insisting on upholding principles. Although he called the Georgian reintegration plan "slick", he acknowledged it showed Georgia was willing to talk directly with its breakaway regions over concrete proposals. He described Turkey's ratification of the Armenia protocols as key for progress on Nagorno-Karabakh, and said he had urged Transnistrian leader Smirnov to engage on the basis of the March 2008 joint declaration, despite the political turmoil in Chisinau. Karasin worried that Yulia Tymoshenko might drag out the election process in Ukraine by going to court. End Summary

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Georgia  
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Geneva Talks  
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12. (C) DFM Grigoriy Karasin told Ambassador Beyrle February 9 that the Geneva Talks had succeeded in keeping the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia more or less quiet. He noted there had been no conflict-related casualties in the regions for nine months, in part due to the Russian troop presence. He criticized Georgia's unwillingness to talk directly with the regions' de facto authorities, an attitude he called a dead end, and dismissed the Georgians' insistence on negotiating with Russia instead.

13. (C) Karasin criticized the co-chairs of the Geneva Talks for breaking the tempo of progress. He condemned their insistence on making the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) fully functional before entertaining other proposals. Noting the EU's co-chairmanship of the process, he said he hoped to visit Brussels before the next (March 30) Geneva round. He wondered what role EU High Representative Ashton might play in the process, especially regarding the future of the EU's special representative structure.

14. (C) Karasin insisted that new security guarantees were needed for the regions. He championed Russia's proposal that Georgia and its regions unilaterally submit non-use of force agreements to the UN Security Council, with Russia, the U.S., and the EU acting as guarantors.

IPRMs  
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¶5. (C) Karasin acknowledged that the IPRM was not working in South Ossetia, due to the South Ossetians' boycott, but spoke out in favor of its continuation. The Ambassador noted that the comparative success of the Abkhaz IPRM showed that it was the South Ossetians, not the Georgians, who were the problem.

He asked Russia to pressure Tskhinvali to reengage in the IPRM, and suggested no new security mechanisms or documents were needed until the existing ones worked. Karasin indicated Moscow was willing to increase efforts to persuade the South Ossetians to engage, saying that any contacts across the administrative boundary line (ABL) were useful.

¶6. (C) Karasin praised that Russian troops and border guards had begun to fine and then release detained Georgians, without handing them over to South Ossetian authorities. Ambassador Beyrle suggested that direct talks between the Georgians and South Ossetians about incidents would be preferable.

Tension and CBMs

¶7. (C) Karasin accused the GOG of using the Geneva Talks to stoke discord rather than seek stability and progress. He claimed the information he had provided the Ambassador late last year about Georgian arms modernization had proved accurate, and that Russia had averted a Georgian provocation by immediately reaching out to the U.S. and EU. He doubted the recent Georgian troop movements were to better protect Tbilisi, saying no threat emanated from the Russian troops in

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South Ossetia.

¶8. (C) Karasin touted the expected March 1 opening of the Qazbegi-Larsi border checkpoint as one confidence-building measure (CBM), saying that only one expert meeting was needed to approve final documents. He described the three direct charter flights between Tbilisi and Moscow as another CBM. He stated that border crossings along the ABLs were routine, with hundreds per day crossing at the Akhagori checkpoint alone, and hundreds of thousands crossing the ABLs so far in total.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador called for more transparency on Russian troop movements, arguing that the Russian base construction in South Ossetia not far from Tbilisi was an understandable source of concern for Georgia.

Georgian Reintegration Plan

¶10. (C) Karasin described the Georgian reintegration plan as "slick" (khitroumniy), as it spoke of resolving the conflict by peaceful means while using unacceptable terms such as 'occupation'. Although the Abkhaz and South Ossetians did not even want to receive the plan, he said he saw some "small positive notes" in it, as the plan listed concrete ideas and documented the GOG's willingness to talk directly to Tskhinvali and Sukhumi.

Nagorno-Karabakh

¶11. (C) Noting his and First Deputy PM Igor Shuvalov's February 5 visit to Armenia, Karasin expressed concern that Turkey might not ratify the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement protocols. If Turkey did not ratify by the end of March, the process would be thrown back, and the "use of force" voices in Baku would ascend. The Armenians were under a lot of internal pressure, with Sargsian threatening to withdraw his signature from the protocols if the Turks did not ratify by the end of March.

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Transnistria  
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¶12. (C) Karasin said Chisinau's political disarray was no reason to interrupt the Transnistrian conflict settlement process. Referring to his February 8 meeting with Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov, Karasin said he had urged Tiraspol to take the initiative on resolving the conflict, and claimed FM Lavrov had used blunt language in advising Smirnov to avoid separatist rhetoric at this sensitive time in Chisinau. He singled out the March 2008 joint statement President Medvedev had brokered as a basis for further talks.

¶13. (C) Karasin reiterated Moscow's position that withdrawing Russian troops from Transnistria would make the conflict resolution harder, and said he bluntly had told Acting President Mihai Ghimpu in late January that his statements about withdrawing Russian troops were irresponsible. It was necessary first to find a political resolution before withdrawing the peacekeepers.

¶14. (C) Karasin criticized Romania's alleged disregard for Moldova's territorial integrity by seeking Moldova's integration into Romania. He welcomed the Ambassador's confirmation that the U.S. was advising Bucharest that such statements were unhelpful.

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Ukraine  
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¶15. (C) Karasin praised the free elections in Ukraine, but worried that losing candidate Yulia Tymoshenko might choose to go to court over the result, possibly delaying the inauguration of the new President to the mid-March deadline. He called Yatseniuk and Tigipko "fresh new faces" and possible candidates for Prime Minister, but sounded less certain that Ukrainian Ambassador to Russia, Konstantin Hrishchenko, might become the new Foreign Minister.

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Comment  
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¶16. (C) Karasin seemed relatively positive about the Geneva Talks, given the ongoing lack of progress there and his criticism of the co-chairs, Georgians, and South Ossetians. Unlike a year ago, Moscow now appears ready to support the format for the long term, with Karasin calling the March 30 meeting the "next of many more." In a private aside with the Ambassador at the meeting's end, he confirmed his view that "it is time" for the South Ossetians to end their boycott of the IPRM.  
Beyrle